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BEGINNING SKETCHES

Doing something the same way and expecting different results is a common phrase used often in the dialogue about 21st century schools. Yet, many actions, deemed as distinct for moving forward, tend to be limited by the policies and habits of the existing school system.

Without a way of viewing the ‘fringes’ or ‘outliers’, schooling can simply be a reinvention of what is possible within the confines of the current budget and entrenched framework. New people with new experience can bring a new perspective with new possibilities, but their capacity to implement new ideas will depend on whether such individuals can influence the masses and shift the boundaries of budgets and assumptions about what great schooling can be. When a school or business hires a leader from within, everyone has a good idea of what that individual brings to the mix, and if they have a track record of being courageous and improving the landscape, they can indeed be a solid choice for success. In the case at WEDJ, I was new and no one could predict whether my leadership DNA, shaped from a variety of educational experiences, would make a positive difference.

No question, my background was diverse compared to most members of my new community. While I grew up as a Canadian, I did manage to understand American culture as I lived close to the US border in Sarnia, Ontario, a bridge away from Port Huron, Michigan. I was afforded the opportunity to discover ABC, CBS and NBC, long before many Canadians, who grew up viewing one television network, the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation). I remember vividly JFK’s shooting on four channels and I witnessed the horrific flames and riots in Detroit in the late sixties. I spent nearly 19 years in Sarnia, so I was quite familiar with the news coming from the United States. By unwrapping the origins of my early leadership roles, I have come to understand what trigger experiences helped develop my teaching attitudes and behaviours. I remember volunteering as an instructor at the YMYWCA as a gymnastics and swim instructor. I knew early on, by Grade 8, that education would be my profession. I was inspired and felt a tremendous sense of accomplishment when the kids in my classes learned something new! Such initial episodes led to leadership roles in our city Parks and Recreation programming and camp counseling at Camp Kenny and Camp Tanamakoon. I remember working on a team at Sarnia’s Adventure Playground that was much like the ‘Maker Spaces’, poised as innovative education spaces today. While we had our share of foot injuries from rusty nails and other preventable workplace-type accidents, young people loved building forts and

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artifacts with hammers, saws and whatever materials we could gather from the local scrap yards.

I was also fortunate to go to one of the first semester high schools in Canada. I was thrilled to only focus on three 90-minute classes at a time. Not stretched by the gauntlet of studying for 6 to 8 classes at one time, I could be enriched by the band, take part in science fairs and read *International Gymnast*, at will. I loved sports and athletics and represented my school at the Ontario Athletic Leadership Camp in the summer of Grade 11. My math teacher, Mr. Strang, and my music teacher, Mr. Timmermans, were incredible educators. Our band travelled often; we played at an international band festival in Belgium and many of us played locally in the school citizen band with community members. I was also thrilled to be selected as one of the first female trumpet players in our school's stage band! My education included Grade 13, so I did not have to take many courses; rather I could concentrate on learning a few at a time. While I took traditional college bound subjects, I regret, however, not having the opportunity to learn more practical trades, such as how to build or fix a car, how to put up dry wall or survey a plot of land. Like many high 'schoolers', my perception of worth was caught up in report card scores, as such achievement held the key to further education and choice in the job market. At the University of Toronto, I enjoyed the smaller anatomy classes where we learned about muscles and bone insertions through 'hands-on' work with cadavers, but I must admit, I rarely attended the classes with over 1000 students, choosing to buy the textbook and teach myself enough to pass these courses. With such numbers, it was difficult for many university undergraduate professors to mentor, connect or therefore, inspire students. My practical leadership experience was nurtured by opportunities generated through the Department of Athletics. Sharon Bradley coordinated the extensive intramural program, and it here where I found a space to create schedules and promote activity for thousands of participants in recreational and more competitive settings. Sharon played a significant role in my leadership development and I will always remain grateful for the opportunities she made available to me, and many others she mentored at U. of T. While I believe the range of opportunities helped expand my creativity, it was the early leadership experiences of moving people to action that probably built up my confidence and channeled me into the world of teaching.

After completing my Bachelor's of Education degree, I recall how difficult it was to find a job. I sent my resume in to every school board in Ontario and I was interviewed in London and Kitchener, Ontario. I kept every rejection letter, enough to wallpaper a room. I was able to land two interviews. I remember meeting Wayne Somerville from the Waterloo County Board of Education; he asked me the question: "Where do you see yourself in five years?" I told Wayne and his team of consultants, that I wanted to be sitting in their chairs, as a consultant. I was relieved when they all chuckled, and when offered the position, they noted they were impressed with my enthusiastic ambition. When many of my classmates had to settle at first for substitute teaching positions, I was fortunate to be able to enter the workforce as a

middle school teacher of English, Mathematics, Science, and Physical and Health Education. I recall the support from the Waterloo Board central office was incredible. We met once a month for professional development sessions on Monday evenings; we were given ample opportunities to write curriculum; we had committed mentors, who inspired and supported us on an ongoing basis. I was part of a vibrant and passionate education community.

Looking back on these times I believe my students turned out to be incredible teachers. By paying attention to how they responded to my teaching, I was able to tweak lessons and develop materials to suite their individual needs. I learned to adjust and put in late hours when planning for teaching 30 to 35 students at one time. After four years, I began my Masters of Education at the Institute of Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto. Part way through the program, my husband was transferred to Saskatoon, so I completed my degree at the University of Saskatchewan (U. of S.). Here, additional research and a thesis component was required, which shifted my interest toward further graduate programming. My professors were extraordinary. Reg Fleming, Alan Ryan, Jack Hope, Sam Robinson and Trevor Gambell, in particular, left a significant mark on my thinking and desire to read and learn more about the complex context of schools and education. U. of S. offered small classes with professors who modeled great teaching. We didn't just read articles and discuss them. In this graduate program, teachers created engaging slide shows, used custom-made teaching materials and games, and often set up simulations or enactments to demonstrate sound instructional practices. It mattered to the professors that the graduate students would be able to grow beyond their work. I also taught undergraduate education courses for U. of S. Probably one of my most enriching experiences was teaching in the indigenous education programs. My students organized an impressive Health Fair; they contacted local community agencies to set up booths and demonstrations filling the main college gymnasium. This integrated experience provided an opportunity for future indigenous educators to write letters, as well as meet, greet and introduce the visitors, who came loaded with materials to share with students and staff at the university campus.

Just as I finished my dissertation at U. of S., my husband was relocated to Montreal, Quebec, where I taught more courses at McGill University in teacher education, namely, curriculum theory and teaching and instructional design courses, in addition to gymnastics for students focusing on teaching physical education. At this time, I also went to night school and took a course in French as a Second Language. Just as I was about to enroll in McGill's PhD program, my husband was transferred back to Toronto. At this point, I was missing the classroom, so I accepted a position in Mississauga, Ontario with the Peel Board of Education, teaching Grade 1, in addition to music, special education, and physical education for grades 4, 5, and 6. I remember developing a student leadership program where students organized games rooms, intramurals and special events. My husband, Simon, and I were also eager to start a family and during my second year we had our first child, Sarah.

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At this time, I was eager to return to the academic community and so applied and was accepted into OISE's PhD program where I spent four years taking courses, completed comprehensive exams, submitted a proposal and completed my dissertation on an inquiry into the linguistics of peer teaching interactions. My research involved working in a K-8 school, with 15 students in grade 4 who opted into a program of peer teaching. In addition to being exposed to a teacher education program, students in grade 4, worked in pairs to plan sixty-minute classes for students in K to grade 3. Students took part in weekly professional development about multiple intelligences and lesson design. As well, the peer teachers examined videotapes of their classes and recorded weekly journal entries about what they would do differently in subsequent lessons. The students exceeded my expectations and the findings contributed to the body of research supporting the benefits of peer teaching. Students not only learned the various subject matter in a deeper way, they also learned the language of teaching, that when applied in this authentic context, made the learning more powerful and memorable for all the participants.

I also taught a variety of health and physical education courses at the Faculty of Education when Michael Fullan was our Dean. In the midst of studying and teaching at OISE-U of T, I had my second child, Martin. My graduate classes at OISE led me to delve deeper into Vygotsky's works and the notion of constructivism, holistic learning and measurement and assessment in education. My advisor, Gordon Wells, taught us much about action and participatory research, something I would continue to use throughout my career. Jack Miller validated the significance of social and emotional intelligence and David Booth remains a constant source of inspiration. His warm sense of humor helped me and many others embrace a love for the arts, and teaching literacy in purposeful and meaningful ways. I was able to complete my Ontario Principal Part I and II courses for my administrator credentials at the same time as completing my PhD in 1996, just in time to receive notice of our next expatriate assignment in Paris, France.

Unable to work in Paris, I took French classes and volunteered as a parent at Marymount School, where I became the Treasurer of the Parent-Teacher Association and coached my kids' basketball and soccer teams. In our third year, I was asked to work on writing a book on the school's 75th anniversary history. This was a fascinating project examining a host of documents and coordinating surveys of former students and staff who shared their perceptions of a school that survived and thrived before and following the Second World War. The nuns had protected many Parisian Jews by hiding them from the Nazis in the basement of their Neuilly school. A scan of the yearbooks revealed a range of educational trends, most notably the progressive practices of the seventies. Their musicals were a highlight, providing an ideal space for students to showcase their applied arts and English skills. At Marymount, I was able to meet and work with many supportive parents, people I remain close friends with today. Just as I was ready to return to the workforce, my husband was reassigned to Belgium where I taught English and became the Curriculum Coordinator for the Middle School at the International School of Brussels (ISB). I worked with more

incredible educators who were adept at, and applied with ease, research-based best practices. I recall Michael Crowley's Journalism class, where students rigorously attended to writing passionate work through research and relentless peer review. His room was abuzz, emulating the context of a modern-day newsroom. He did not need to be present; the students knew exactly what to do and how to do it. It felt like I was observing a teaching and learning masterpiece. My mentor, Angela Purcell, was a brilliant and passionate educator who demonstrated a wonderful openness to new ideas and acted as a devoted support for her fellow teachers. Rather than send teachers to Harvard's Project Zero (PZ), we brought a PZ team to ISB. I had been working with students on establishing a peer teaching elective course, so I presented with my middle school students this proposal at the PZ conference, that ISB hosted for a dozen or more European international schools.

We landed back in Toronto after Simon was transferred back home to Canada in 2001. I interviewed for a Curriculum Coordinator position at Havergal College in Toronto which included teaching a grade 4 math and language arts class. I enjoyed teaching at this girls' school, but the opportunity to establish customized and innovative curriculum was limited, so after a year I applied to the Sterling Hall School for boys where I worked for over five years with Ian Robinson and a team of passionate educators eager to make a difference in the lives of young boys. I remember how much I enjoyed learning from and with Luke Coles, Dorota Trnik, and James Hay, some of the most creative, fun and positive people I've met in education, teachers who truly resonated with our students. I also appreciated the insight and 'can do' spirit of the finance director, Dave Stevenson. I was very fortunate to work for a principal who was open to developing an elective program, the SHARK inquiry program (Sterling Has Action Research Kids), the Stewardship (character education) Program and The Sterling Institute, that brought together teachers from many schools to discuss issues of social and emotional development. At this time, I was also excited about establishing an action research network with Mary Gauthier at Upper Canada College for local schools in Toronto. We worked on hosting conferences where teachers displayed and defended their research. As well, we co-edited a book filled with teachers' research projects called: *'Ask Me About My Action Research.'* I was truly fortunate to work at Sterling and be supported to participate and present at international conferences in Washington, San Francisco, Boston, and Johannesburg, South Africa. During my time at Sterling, I was asked to take part in several Canadian Education Standards Institute (CESI) accreditation teams. where I had an opportunity to work with several inspiring educators. We would read a self-study of a school in advance of our visitations and then write an external review based on our observations of what we viewed and what recommendations we had for further improvement. I later worked with Jackie Copp, an experienced educator and consultant from Manitoba, on a project that involved reviewing over 30 self and external school reports, to publish examples of innovative and engaging teaching in independent schools in Canada in the resource: *Mining for Gems: A Casebook of Exceptional Practices in Teaching and Learning.*

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At the time this book went to print, I was approached to help establish a new charter school in Detroit, Michigan. I was eager to learn about charters and even more delighted to work with Diane Manica, from the University of Detroit Mercy, Michael Carter from Nashville, Michelle Ruscitti-Miller from Chicago and Jalen Rose. Rose grew up near the school, graduated from the University of Michigan, played professional basketball and was working as an ESPN sportscaster at the time. His passion for making a difference in Detroit and learning about education was genuine. This enthusiastic and passionate planning team approached this work with a ‘go big or go home’ attitude. It took nearly two years to complete the curriculum, hire the teachers and provide professional development for staff at the Jalen Rose Leadership Academy (JRLA), but these efforts were worth it. I devoted almost every waking moment to building this dream high school. From the beginning, I had reservations about starting a school in grade 9, recognizing the more ideal scenario of growing a school K-12. An aligned curriculum from kindergarten to twelfth grade would have increased the chances of student academic success many-fold. Funding, however, was earmarked only for high school, so Jalen’s dream, etched on the back of a napkin, for having a K-12 campus, was adapted to take the form of a four-year college preparation high school.

At JRLA, we developed a signature leadership course that would be taught by a staff advisor, who was supposed to follow the students each year and keep in contact with them when they went on to college. This idea was built on an experience shared by co-founder, Michael Carter, who after the riots in 1967, was selected to be part of the inaugural group of inner-city high school graduates admitted to the University of Detroit, as part of *Project 100*. I recall Michael speaking often about Dr. Davis-Penn, his counselor, who called him every night during his first college semester to talk about his classes, homework and college professors. The idea of a ‘guardian angel’ to help students keep their ‘eyes on the prize’ was a part of Mike’s education; he was eager to see this experience replicated in some way at JRLA. I thought it was an excellent idea and I was very pleased to see that Mike, and his wife Pam, have since established a scholarship in Davis-Penn’s honor, to serve as a model for others to ‘pay it forward.’ Fittingly, the University of Detroit Mercy awarded Mike the Spirit of UDM Honor.

In 1968, University of Detroit created Project 100, a program designed to admit and support inner-city public and parochial high school graduates with high academic potential to the University. Michael A. Carter was in the inaugural class of that groundbreaking program...He is a member of The 100 Black Men of Middle Tennessee and many other civic organizations...Carter attributes his success at UDM, and in his life’s work, to his Project 100 counselor, Dr. Delores A. Davis-Penn. Dr. Davis-Penn provided unwavering support and guidance, particularly during Carter’s freshman year. Mindful of the support needed and dedicated to helping students succeed, Carter and his wife Pamela L. Carter ’71 established a scholarship fund in honor of Dr. Delores A. Davis-Penn, which

provides generous financial assistance to qualified graduates of the Jalen Rose Leadership Academy. (<https://www.udmercy.edu/stay-connected/news-events/newsletters/clae/2015/01/alumni-achievement/index.htm>)

The Carters' generosity was truly significant at JRLA. In addition to being there in person to mentor and support the students and the school on the planning team, Pam and Mike went above and beyond the call of duty to support the school financially. It didn't just take a community to build a school, it took a self-less community, and it was a privilege to be among them. I am so proud to say that four years after the inaugural class, my husband and I attended the first graduation in the spring of 2015. JRLA exceeded their graduation goals by having close to 100% of their students accepted at college.

My husband's final expatriate assignment took us to the DC area. When I arrived on August 22, 2011, it was just in time to experience an earthquake that registered 5.8 on the Richter scale. While I was somewhat shaken up, this did not stop my fierce commitment to finding a job in the teaching field. Triggered by the opportunity to help build and play a key role in opening the Jalen Rose Leadership Academy (JRLA), I was fascinated by the potential for charter schools to be a space for implementing best practices in teaching and learning. I established a *Linked'in* presence and began browsing the local sites to see what kinds of principal roles were turning up. Given school had already started, the options for school leadership positions, did not open up until the next school year. I spent most of my time reading about US charter schools while searching for a space eager to become an ideal school.

The experiences I've had along the way with brave, thoughtful and inspiring people, have all contributed to the educator I am today. As much as my experience was shaped with my staff at WEDJ, I was aware they had important stories and experiences to bring to the table, as well. How well we could merge our passions and ideas was all about bringing the 'outlier' ideas into the fold, mine and the existing members of my new school community. My story of dreaming a school at WEDJ was rooted in cultivating a learning environment where all students and staff members could learn and become anything. While it is rare for things to turn out as planned, this leadership experience at WEDJ proved to be one of the most compelling, invigorating and challenging chapters in my educator life. This story of rebuilding a foundation in a school is about perseverance, celebration and resolve. I have come to understand that three key ingredients are necessary for building a dream school: talented teachers, engaged students and an expert-driven education system. It is hopeful that by sharing my principal story, future school leaders can be aware of constructive actions that can contribute to sustaining engaging learning conditions, at the same time as making provisions for adapting to limitations that can short change the goal of cultivating an ideal school culture.